

Jewish Meditation in the Context of Prayer:

A Case Study in Jewish Day School Education

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Introduction

This paper presents the findings of a week-long experiment in Jewish prayer at SAR High School in Riverdale, NY. For one week at the academic mid-year, students were excused from their traditional, grade-wide *shacharit* (morning service) and were required to join one of twenty specialized, alternative, and experimental prayer groups. As the leader of the meditation *tefila* (prayer service), I chose to construct a case-study of my prayer group through a retrospective and written exit survey. I found that students characterized their general relationship with *tefila* as negative, whereas most sought opportunities, following our week's experiment, to integrate practices of meditation into their daily *tefila*. By contextualizing this week's curriculum and practice within studies of the history of contemplative practices, Jewish prayer, and mental health, as well as through conducting a case study of students' experiences prior to, during, and following this week long experiment, my findings suggest that secondary Jewish day school students might deepen their practice of daily prayer by integrating certain contemplative practices that would, in turn, afford students the opportunity to cultivate a spiritual disposition and enjoy a certain degree of mental calm and clarity.

The stress of the rigorous, typically dual curriculum of the Jewish secondary-school need not be stated. In regional modern Orthodox Jewish high schools in the tri-state area, students

usually attend school for 8-10 hours daily, and in a competitive, college-preparatory environment. Yet, there is great opportunity built into the school day to de-stress—and to do so in a distinctly Jewish and spiritually oriented manner. Most Jewish day schools mandate daily—if not twice daily--attendance to a traditional prayer service, and nearly all students who attend such schools participate in such services in some form or manner.

At SAR High School, as at many of our peer schools, *tefila* is not a graded class—the only expectation that carries a penalty is regular attendance of *tefila*. Student participation, therefore, varies from based on students' interest in volunteering. And as SAR High School is a modern Orthodox high school, very few opportunities exist for female students to participate in an active role during prayer services. Naturally, then, SAR administrators designed a week of alternative *tefila* to capitalize on varied student interest in alternative modes of engagement, with the goal of cultivating a spiritual disposition of *D'veyikut*—spiritual devotion—as was the year's school-wide theme. Prayer services such as meditation seemed a natural place, therefore, for students to develop such dispositions.

Yet, with the acknowledgment that such an opportunity exists as a core element of the Jewish day school curriculum—typically, students at SAR High School and other, peer schools spend about 10% of their academic day engaged in prayer—educators and social critics have only recently articulated how little curricular attention is brought to regular *tefila* on a secondary level. The Spring 2013 *Hayidiyon*, published by RAVSAK was entirely devoted to prayer in primary and secondary private schools, and its editor, Barbara Davis, writes about the evident challenge in Jewish day schools—in particular, all of “the authors in this issue struggle”, she notes, “with the fact that prayer in school is often rote, devoid of meaning, emotionless, irrelevant to the pray-ers.” (4) Flipping through this focused study, one notices how various

featured Jewish educators articulate such a challenge. Of note is Chana Tanenbaum's limited but notable statistical study. Tanenbaum notes how only 16.4% "of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the event [of tefila] is spiritually uplifting, while in contrast, 20% of the same group found participation in a sports team to be fairly or extremely meaningful to their religious growth." (22). Tanenbaum does not attempt to articulate a positive solution; as she says, the purpose of her paper is to "awaken the community to the extent of the problem." (23)

Methodology

In what follows, however, I would like to follow James Jacobson-Maisels' critique in the same issue, as his suggestion is one that articulates both a challenge and a solution that I have substantiated and deepened in my own case study. Maisels identifies the pedagogical challenge as one that is deeply-seated in "insufficient and misguided prayer education." He continues:

This is seen initially in its focus on skills and the siddur rather than on the transformative power of prayer itself as a spiritual practice. While skills and knowledge of the siddur are undoubtedly important and essential building blocks in developing a prayer life, they are not sufficient to make prayer meaningful and important to students and for them to create a continuing relationship to prayer throughout their lives. (18)

Maisels suggests that the key to shifting education around prayer has to do with recasting it as a "goal oriented practice" in which prayer is taught as a transformative and meaningful spiritual practice." This demands that educators embrace prayer's spiritual component and potential by teaching "prayer as a technique to cultivate certain emotions, dispositions and ways of being in the world." (18) At the end of his reflection, Maisels suggests that prayer could cultivate at least

eleven spiritual dispositions (19), and he offers a potpourri of precedents for various experiential methods' religious histories. He writes:

...the tradition is replete with other recommended techniques such as using music to evoke the power of particular blessings in the Amidah (Sefer Chasidim), imagining oneself before the Divine Presence (Sanhedrin 22a, Elijah de Vidas), mindfulness meditation (Piaseczner Rebbe), mantra practice (Besht), eye gestures (Yevamot 105b), hand gestures (Shabbat 10a), trembling (Shulhan Arukh), requests as the cultivation of humility and dependence (Bahya ibn Pakuda), personalizing each blessing (Yerushalmi Brakhot 4:4), weeping and groaning (Devarim Rabba, Va-etchanan, 2:1) among others.

(19)

Through such integration of experiential mind and body practices, Maisels suggests, students can personalize the base skills of prayer—recitation, translation, and sometimes rote repetition. Ultimately, through such cultivation, students will develop certain spiritual dispositions that will aid in maturing their conception and experience of prayer—not to mention help them maintain a positive psychological and mental health.

Background

The health benefits of prayer have been shown widely in various academic studies. Recent studies have shown significant linkages between regular prayer and mental and physical health. In one recent and very comprehensive study (2003), nine hypotheses about “the link between religion or spirituality and mortality, morbidity, disability, or recovery from illness” demonstrated that “there is a strong, consistent, prospective, and often graded reduction in risk of

mortality in church/service attenders”—a reduction that is “approximately 25% after adjustment for confounders.” (36)

The particular implementation of meditation within or without a spiritual tradition in secondary settings has demonstrated consistently positive and statistically verifiable results for students’ mental dispositions, though some studies that have reached even beyond to demonstrate academic benefits have had mixed receptions. While academic success is more easily quantifiable for its measurable results, multiples studies that measured academic success and mental health—both in secondary academic settings—in relation to regular meditation practice proved that the former’s causality is tenuously linked, while the latter’s relation has proven recently to be statistically significant.

Indeed, while three hopeful studies published by the Maharishi International University Press “reported beneficial effects of Transcendental Meditation (TM) on academic performance on both the high school and college levels.” (644), Domino (1977) failed to find “standardized test support for a TM claim of increased creativity, and Carsello and Creasar (1978) conducted an elaborate statistical analysis of such findings and found, by controlling for the experimental group, that “TM does not appear to be a universal cure-all for improving grades of all students.” (645).

Recent longitudinal and statistical studies, however, have shown how practices of meditation have mitigated both psychological distress in students (2011) and generalized teacher stress and burn-out rates (1999). In both studies, students and teachers practiced a daily, standardized form of Transcendental Meditation. Teachers who practiced for five weeks still felt, at their 9-week follow-up, “less exhausted and worn out” (17) than their control group.

Secondary-school students who had meditated daily reported a significant reduction in “psychological distress” (112)

As a case study of select individuals in our school community, I submit that both the methodology and the goals of this study are narrative driven—through assessing students’ own reflections on their experiences, I make certain suggestions to strengthen students’ spiritual being and mental health. I also acknowledge my own epistemological blindspots, given my place in the school community as a school teacher, and given my place in the Jewish community as a regular pray-er. Further, I also confess to the complicity with which I conducted this survey: I was at once the experiment and the researcher, as I was both the instructor of the meditation *tefila* and the ethnographer of the *tefila*’s setting. Conducting a true ethnography as a cultural “insider” is nearly impossible, but recognizing and articulating my own blindspots within this study might cultivate an attentiveness that an outsider might naturally have.

Others, too, have struggled with the potential challenges and possible approaches to studying one's own community as an ethnographer. Beverly J. Moss raises a number of questions and challenges, including the two following points: “(3) Will the ethnographer make assumptions about what certain behaviors signify or how meaning is established in this community based on previous knowledge or on the actual data collected? (4) Would an outsider attach more significance to observed patterns than the insider, based on the degrees of distance?” (163) Implicit in Moss's questions is the problem of proximity, and in her formulation of it, this “problem” is nearly an epistemological one inasmuch as it suggests that a certain objectivity through social and cultural distancing generates findings that approximate true knowledge. Moss cites Seteny Shami, an Arab anthropologist and ethnographer of her own community, who reports “overlook[ing] patterns because they are not unique or strange or new”, much as she

herself had been, in her own research of rhetorical patterns in her community's churches, "looking for events that stood out" while overlooking "routine [rhetorical] events [that] were unimportant" (167). Moss suggests, therefore, that to succeed in studying one's own community, the ethnographer must make the "familiar strange" (169)--in a sense, the studying of one's own community necessitates a proper understanding of and self-understanding by the ethnographer.

At the same time, as a teacher-researcher, I follow Ruth Ray with the belief that teacher research challenges the conventional belief in the separation "between researchers (those who make knowledge) and teachers (those who consume and disseminate it)." (174). However, Ray writes that teacher research must acknowledge its own blindspots to recognize its unique findings: "Research, like Recognition, is a Reflexive act. It means looking—and looking again. The new kind of Research would not mean going after new 'data', but rather reconsidering what is at hand." (179)

Thus, I attempt to study that in which I am personally invested and engaged. I am not only a teacher in the very school in which I conduct this study, but I am a devotee of contemplative Jewish practices and teachings. Whether or not I succeed, then, I attempt to make the familiar strange in this ethnography by differentiating between protocols, findings, and recommendations based on the study results. Perhaps, too, I am too embedded in this community to make a meaningful recommendation based on this research, but my experience has found that too few studies exist that examine this nexus of the pedagogical and spiritual. If anything, this study will prompt educators and researchers of education to reconsider—much as Ray suggests—"what is at hand."

Protocols

With an acknowledgment then, of both the epistemological blindspots and the opportunity for conducting research in which I reconsider that which is all too familiar, I proceed with the case study parameters and protocols. The objective of this study was to assess the effects of a week-long meditation intensive on a variety of high school students. Students were “selected” for this particular prayer session by the school administration based partially on the administration’s preference for a diversely gendered and aged group (students were evenly distributed by grade and gender) and on the students’ articulated preferences for an alternative *tefila*. Thus, we should acknowledge at the outset that each student brought his or her own biases towards the practice of meditation and for the value of integrating meditation into *tefila*. Most students who attended the *tefila* likely chose to do so, though perhaps not as a first choice (students were allowed three choices and were promised one).

Students who had elected to participate in the meditation *tefila* of the twenty featured alternatives had read the following pithy description before making their decision: “This **tefilah** incorporates guided meditations through a minimal, halakhic *tefila*. The meditations are based on both Jewish and universal practices, including meditations from Sefer Yetzira and chasidic texts, as well as the practice of *zazen*, the breathing and body practices of Zen Buddhism. This **tefilah** also incorporates contemplative nigunim either between *tefillot* or to the words of a select **tefilah**.” Thus, very much like Maisels’ description earlier of an ideal, experimental *tefila*, students knew that they would access prayer through a variety of mind and body practices that are embedded in their tradition and universally shared, whether or not they were familiar with

such precedent for such practices within their own tradition and/or familiar with any of these practices more generally.

The instructor, myself, attempted to conduct the tefila in an organized manner, despite the diverse techniques explored. While fulfilling the bare minimum of a *halachik* tefila, students were introduced to a select core of meditations that operated as spaces between or deepened experiences of what were identified as the four movements of *shacharit*: *birchot ha'shachar* (morning blessings); *p'sukei d'zimra* (verses of song); *birchot k'riat sh'ma* (blessings of sh'ma); *shmone esre* (the silent benediction). This movement of four segments was overlaid with various structures of ascensions of four that generally appear in traditional and mystical Jewish thought: the four levels of the soul discussed in various kabbalistic texts; four levels of the mystical realms as detailed by the *Tanya*; the four letters of God's name, as explicated by the *Zohar*. Students were also reminded, each day, that most of the meditations exercised over the course of the week were body practices, practices that demanded their conscious attention to a movement of the body. In turn, it was suggested to them that they might find a greater clarity or focus to the very texts and movements of their traditional (and at this point, as high school students practiced in daily prayer), deeply familiar practice.

The first meditation taught was one loosely based on what is termed "mindfulness" meditation, in which students were talked slowly through slow breathing, body relaxation, and mindful stillness. The goal of this experience was to calm the students' minds before they embarked into the textual realm of prayer. One key text integrated into this teaching was the reading of a paragraph from the introduction to Rabbi A.Y. Kook's *Olat R'eya*, in which Kook

writes that one of the prerequisites for proper prayer is quieting the mind to attend to the soul's natural and perpetual activity of constant prayer. In Kook's words:

Tefillah is only wholesome when it arises from the idea that in truth the soul is always praying. She [the prayer of the soul] flies and embraces her lover without any break or separation. At the moment of actual prayer the perpetual soul-prayer is revealed in action.

(1)

Students were eventually instructed, after a few minutes of relaxed and mindful sitting, to attend to the constant prayer of the soul, and at the very least, to attend, to simply sit in awareness, of all that reached their senses.

Next, students practiced various breathing and mantra-like meditations around the central verse of Sh'ma. One meditation was based on Aryeh Kaplan's reading of *Sefer Yetzira* in his work *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide*, in which a deep in-breath leads to an out-breath articulated as a "shin", followed by a deep in-breath that leads to an out-breath that is articulated as a "mem". The "ayin", as it were, is the silence in between the two (Kaplan 129). Students were instructed about the depth of this teaching (the shin/mem polarity is one of chaos and unity, heat and cold, and ultimate tension that leads to the mystical ideal of *yichud*, union), and they practiced this breathing technique, along with their instructor, for about five minutes. The second "Sh'ma" meditation was a Kirtan meditation in which students chanted slowly the full verse—*Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad*—in a call-and-response fashion. Such a repetitive and ecstatic repetition was not unfamiliar to students, as it is performed at the peak moments of Yom Kippur during the Neilah service. Students were also informed that such a call-and-response form of chanting verse is a practice of Kirtan, or mystical Hinduism.

During *P'sukei D'zimra*, students were instructed in a mystical “Shiviti” visualization, in which, having quieted their minds, they brought into focus in their minds’ eye the four letters of God’s ineffable name: Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh. They were then instructed, to pass the first Yud of the name through the Heh, down the length of the Vav, and then through the final Heh. Such a meditation, students were told, is sourced in the Rabbi Joseph Gikatalia and popularized in Aryeh Kaplan’s *Meditation and Kabbalah*. In this text, the meditation operates as a visualization of God’s influence in the world, and primarily through imagining an experience of God’s kindness. Ideally, God’s affect is imagined as descending from potential to manifest, and the Yud here is a pun on the verse from the *Ashrei* prayer to which students were instructed to focus this meditation: *Poteach et Yadecha U'masbia L'chol Chai Ratzon*. Gikatalia here instructs the reader to replace “Yadecha” with “Yudcha”—not your hand, but your Yud (Kaplan 131). During the same meditation, students concluded this focused visionary experience by imagining a friend or someone they know who is suffering in some way—and to embrace their peer’s presence by praying for God’s affects on their lives, too. Finally, if students were unable to hold all four letters of God’s name in their consciousness, they were instructed to hold a single letter, an Aleph, to cultivate such focus. They were told to watch the Aleph as it expanded into their entire visual field in all four directions—thus, similarly, allowing them to experience a transcendent vision in four aspects.

Finally, before *Barchu* and *Shmone Esre*, students were instructed in mindful standing, bowing, and walking meditations. Students were briefly instructed about the value of mindful standing or swaying by way of referencing historical precedents for either practice during traditional prayer. The Talmud, Vilna Gaon, and various Hasidic thinkers were cited for their preferences for or against movement while praying.

While they were instructed to experience standing meditations, students were asked to hold a Yogic mountain pose and to move from a mountain pose into a “forward fold”, relaxing their bodies as their spines fully extended in such a collapsed pose. Such movement brought greater attention to the dynamics of bowing, about which they were instructed to extend their entire spine—followed, in turn, by a snake-like arching of the back as they returned to a standing pose. Both of these movements were contextualized by an instructive Talmudic text.

The subsequent walking meditation was classically that of *zazen*, or Zen Buddhist walking meditation, in which students removed shoes and walked, with upright posture, in a slowly moving circle. While walking, students were told to soften their gazes downwards and to bring great attention to the slow movement of their feet rotating from their heels to the balls of their feet. Students were informed that the goal of such movement was to instruct in mindful movement in the world; of all of the meditations, it had the least relevance and opportunity for *tefila* integration.

Observations

With the exception of Torah reading days, each day’s session lasted for forty consecutive minutes. Each of the aforementioned meditations did not extend beyond five minutes. On two occasions, I included musical accompaniment—singing a traditional Hasidic tune with guitar accompaniment—as an introduction to the day. Students arrived promptly and silently and generally followed the instruction to “spread out” so that they weren’t sitting immediately adjacent to another student.

In general, students remained quiet and responsive to each of the modes of instruction, but as the instructor of the prayer session, I was unable to conduct observations and gather observational data while instructing and practicing with the students. Thus, one blindspot present in this study was my own participation—and instruction—of each meditation type and the limited ability to depict the *tefila*, gather student feedback, and offer recommendations in retrospect. Of the nearly thirty students participating in the alternative prayer week, twenty agreed to complete a comprehensive survey regarding their experience before, during, and after the week. The answers of the survey were responses to the following narrative-driven questions:

1. What is your relationship with *tefila*, in general?
2. Which practices of meditation did you find meaningful or effective? Why?
3. Can you describe the feeling of sitting through a meditation *tefila*?
4. Did you arrive at any realizations about yourself, *Tefila*, or God through meditating?
5. Did you notice anything different about yourself or the world after a particular day or at the end of the week?
6. How do you intend to integrate a particular practice(s) into your daily *tefila*?

Students completed this survey a week after the experimental prayer week had concluded.

Students gathered with the *tefila* instructor during their regular *Beit Midrash* period and completed the survey, discussed their responses, and participated in one final meditation.

Students were told that their results would be shared with others in a public forum such as this.

Thus, many students elected to respond to their written responses anonymously (and they were encouraged to do so by their instructor).

Results

Of the twenty students from the 9th through 12th grade who responded to the survey, most responded to all of the questions, and with the following trends. All of the quotes included below of student responses are direct transcriptions of their written responses, and so all grammatical and spelling inconsistencies are retained.

In response to Question #1, students characterized their general relationship with *tefila* prior to their experimental week of meditation *tefila* as follows: fifteen out of twenty students reported feeling apathetic or negative in some way about their daily practice (students reported not participating; resisting *tefila*, “doing their own thing”; wanting to connect, but in other ways). Of these students, one wrote how “is a struggle for me during the regular prayers to feel connected and to only concentrate on the prayers that are given.” Another wrote that “I am not as connected as I would like to be and I am always looking for new ways/methods to become closer to God and have a meaningful *tefila*”. The other five students characterized their general relationship with *tefila* as positive or neutral (these students used language such as “engaged, active, participant, practice regularly”). One of these students wrote “I always appreciate being given time in my day to *daven*. I find it rewarding, and it helps me feel gratitude.”

While this first question focused primarily on their experiences preceding our experimental week, Question #3 allowed the students to reflect on their experiences of sitting through a meditation *tefila* as they could best recall them. Here, all students reported feeling calmer in some way while sitting, while 10 (half of the group) reported feeling calm *and* noticing a greater spiritual connectedness. The former group did not exclude God from their responses, but their responses’ language chose to focus closely on their experience engaged in meditation,

as opposed to the experience of prayer. One typical response from this group read: “Sitting through meditation was very different but I felt I adjusted very quickly to the new techniques it really calmed me down and helped me focus.” Another student of this same sub-set described the experience as “calm, relaxing, ‘I am not my thoughts’”. The paradigmatic sentiment of the calmed student might be reflected in this student’s response:

Sitting through a meditation tefila was the perfect way to start my day. In addition to its relaxing vibe, I felt centered and lighter when I left. One of the best parts was learning about the zen teaching to “watch your thoughts.” I was able to distance myself from some of the regular daily stress because of that.

The students who felt a spiritual transcendence in addition to a “focus”, “lightness” or “calm”, in the experience of a meditation tefila responded with language that explicitly referenced God or a greater spiritual connectedness:

I think it is much easier to connect to Hashem when you can just focus on your thoughts, by yourself, instead of just reading words off a page.

..by Thursday, all of a sudden I was able to empty my mind and think about nothing...and everything. I learned that I can come closer to God and Tefila in new ways. I just have to find the best way for me.

It’s very relaxing and I feel more comfortable in connecting with God in a room with a lot of other people.

Remarkably, nearly all of the students expressed a shift in their experience, and with the exception of one respondent, all described the experience as calming.

Students characterized the most meaningful or effective exercises of the week, in response to Question #2, with a diverse range of interests. This made sense, given the fact that a variety of contemplative and body meditations had been explored. Responses focused notably on the Sh'ma breathing and chanting meditations, including "I enjoyed our Shma meditation because I liked the idea of incorporating meditation into the actual words of tefila, rather than it be a totally separate type of prayer"; "I love how the chanting makes me feel at one with God. "; "I found that the "shma yisrael" was very effective. it was a way that I really got into and helped me connect to god by just saying the first line" ;"When we recited the sh'ma, because it sounded so powerful and almost hypnotized me." and a longer, paradigmatic response:

I particularly loved the responsive chanting of sh'ma. I had been very skeptical about the whole every aspect of meditation, but as we chanted the words, building towards the complete verse, I truly felt a massive wave of collective energy and intent in the vibrations. It made me realize that there was a whole realm of possibilities that I had not known before, but also made me question some of my other assumptions.

Other students found other techniques useful. One chose to talk about the pre-prayer, guided silence and body relaxation as most effective: "I found the few minutes of silence each day meaningful. It is important to take time before your tefila to reflect on the good things and bad things in your life. This way, you can think about what you are going to ask for and be thankful for." Another said that a focused meditation on an envisioned object was most useful: "I think the silent meditation where you asked us to focus on something for example a sick person." And

others enjoyed the slowed breathing exercises for their calming properties: “When we did deep breathing it calmed me down and helped me think”; “Breathing exercises helped me gather all of my thoughts”.

When asked if they had noticed or come to any realizations about anything related to themselves, prayer, God, or the world through the week of meditation *tefila* (Questions #4 and #5), some students offered a mix of frustration and hope, while others noticed remarkable shifts. Yet others chose not to respond at all. Of those who could recall insights discovered through the meditation *tefila*, three students wrote that they noticed a positive shift in their self image, four students noticed that their *tefila* came more easily, and four others thought that their relationship with God had changed. Of those who responded to insights about their life beyond the meditation *tefila*, three noted that their capacity for relaxation had been affected, three noted that their religious practice of prayer has shifted, two thought that something would change in their lives but hadn’t yet, and five simply stated that nothing had changed. Some of the highlights of the students’ responses for this segment of the survey include the following:

When I say Shmone esre now, I try to stand in mountain pose and concentrate on my breath while I say the words

In my daily *tefilla*, I want to just sit silently for a few minutes and clear my thoughts.

Usually after davening I feel tense and anxious but after meditation I felt very relaxed.

I think about my davening a little more, and what I am saying

I found myself thinking about the things I enjoy in everyday life, and I learned how to be a calmer person.

I think it is much easier to connect to Hashem when you can just focus on your thoughts, by yourself, instead of just reading words off a page.

Finally, when asked about their intentions to integrate the various techniques taught the week of meditation tefila (Question #6), thirteen out of twenty students responded in the affirmative, with only one student responding with a definitive negative (“I do not intend to”). Six students chose not to respond to this question. Students’ positive responses ranged from the actual—what they had already implemented—to the possible. Of the actual, one student said how now, when he/she recites Shmone Esre, “I try to stand in mountain pose and concentrate on my breath while I say the words.” The same student wrote how “Ideally, I would love to start meditating on a regular basis.” Another student wrote how “I try before I put on my tefilin to calm myself down and breath, I try to also not say every prayer but rather specific prayers, quality over quantity.” Other responses seemed more hypothetical and sometimes unspecific, though not less powerful: “I can try to meditation [sic]”, “focus more on one tefila”, “during davening just breath”, “do more deep breathing during prayers”, “think to myself for a minute after davening about what I just prayed for”, and “to think about Hashem and what you’re appreciative of”.

Discussion

While certain students chose not to answer each question—and while a slight minority of students felt misplaced or unaffected by the *tefila*—most of the student participants offered overwhelmingly positive reflections on their experiences from the experimental prayer week.

Most students were able to articulate how *tefila* had shifted from a typically neutral or negative experience to one in which they might personalize and strengthen such *tefila* with particular techniques of integrated meditation. Most students were also able to identify a particular mode of meditation with which they most identified or through which they were most moved. Finally, most of the participating students were moved by the possibility for a profound experiential *tefila* that integrated locally Jewish and universal spiritual practices, as opposed to imagining spiritual experience on the one hand, and rote, daily prayer practice on the other. Their reflections testify to the possibility for a synergistic experience within the daily prayer service, even as some seemed pensive or even doubtful in their surveys regarding such integration without the continued support and instruction of an explicitly alternative prayer group.

With all of that said, of course, various idiosyncratic weaknesses unique to this study should not go unstated. The case study presents a certain degree of significant bias, as the instructor of the meditation *tefila* acted as ethnographer of the case study, and the students who both elected to participate and chose to respond to the survey were a self-selected group inclined or pre-disposed, in some way, to the practice of meditation. I only offer this study as an initial gesture into the yet unexamined field of contemplative pedagogy in Jewish day schools. Another, more comprehensive and ideal case study might randomly select students to participate in such an effort; it might also engage a researcher who is sufficiently foreign to the school community and the instructional models.

Recommendations

Certainly, it might be difficult to quantify a singular or authentic spiritual experience. Even masters of many spiritual traditions would insist on honoring the unique, subjective experience of the spiritual journey and its traveler. Each of the students surveyed brought his or her own biases about and hopes for a meditation *tefila*, and as the group was self-selected, the case study here might not be representative of that which might be implemented in a school-wide curriculum. That said, the positive outcome of the experience of the meditation *tefila* points to the greater truth regarding *tefila* in general and meditation, more generally: students respond positively to *tefila* if they can personalize their experiences and elect to engage; students respond positively to *tefila* if it can be a means through which they can access emotionally the rote recitation of daily prayer; and students respond positively to *tefila* if it can be a affective mode in which they cultivate a spiritual disposition. Each of the various experiential techniques did not speak to every member of the group studied here, but with a fair balance of chanting, breathing, body movement, visualization, and mindfulness, students found opportunities to integrate at least one of the practices here with some satisfaction and even excitement.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, regardless of a school's orientation towards implementing an integrated meditation *tefila*, this case study demonstrates the strong effects of implementing a distinctly Jewish course of meditation in a Jewish day school setting. As seen in this case study, nineteen out of twenty respondents were able to articulate the positive effects affected by a daily regimen of meditation apart from their deepened practice as Jewish pray-ers. Schools, therefore, should consider the great opportunity to present a contemplative path and cultivate a spiritual disposition within the context of traditional Jewish thinkers and practices.

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